

What other people think of us

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WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK OF US.

Italian Swiss Defend Confederation.

By DEMAREE BESS.

Staff Correspondent of

The Christian Science Monitor.

If one looked all over Europe to-day in search of a probable setting for an acute minority problem, typical of those disturbing so many European countries, one might settle upon Italian Switzerland.

Here, it seems, are all the elements for such a problem. The Italian Swiss compose only one fifteenth of the population of Switzerland, and differ completely in language, race, and customs from the majority. They are concentrated in two Cantons (Provinces) next to the Italian border; districts which are isolated geographically from the rest of Switzerland by high mountain ranges, but are so closely connected geographically with adjoining Italy that it is impossible for a stranger to tell where Italian Switzerland ends and Italy begins. It is one of the least prosperous districts of Switzerland.

For 16 years the vigorously nationalist and totalitarian system of Fascism has been dominant in Italy; during all this time the Italian-speaking districts of Switzerland have been subjected to its persuasive propaganda. The Swiss have erected no cultural barriers against Fascism; one finds on sale in Lugano and Locarno all the principal Fascist newspapers and magazines and books. The Swiss Confederation, meanwhile, has offered no counterpropaganda. It has done no more, in fact, than to leave its Italian-speaking citizens very much to their own devices, just as it has its German and French-speaking citizens.

This situation seems to provide a real testing ground for the merits of Swiss principles of local autonomy, decentralism, genuine self rule, which in many respects are the antithesis of Fascism. It seems really worth while to discover what is happening in Italian Switzerland just now, when Europe is electric with tension, partly created by "ideological" disputes in which Italian Fascism takes an active part.

What is the attitude of this small and "un-assimilated" minority in Switzerland? Are the Italian Swiss ready to "revolt" against the German-speaking majority in their Confederation? Do they resent being a minority, as many other minorities in Europe do, and do some of them want to break away and join the Italian neighbour with which they are closely allied in language, race and culture?

We sought an answer to these questions from the Italian Swiss themselves. We visited their two principal cities of Lugano and Locarno, motored through several of their farming villages, scattered along mountain valleys and lake shores. Everywhere we encountered the Latin friendliness and courtesousness to the foreigner, and talked with men and women of several occupations.

Loyal to Confederation's Ideals.

It is pleasant indeed to report that there seems to be no "problem" here, in this place where one might expect to find a difficult situation. The writer is convinced that there is no more loyal population in Switzerland than the men and women of these Italian-speaking border districts. They are loyal not only to the Swiss Confederation, but also to its ideals and principles.

Fascist proximity has not in the least disturbed their basic thinking; it does not even excite them. The writer was told of an Italian lady, an ardent Fascist, who came to live for a time in a Lugano boardinghouse, to whose Swiss inhabitants she preached the glories of Fascism. Her listeners were polite but unresponsive. One day she burst into tears, and cried: "You are Italians in race and language, but you do not feel yourselves a party of the new Italy. You make me very unhappy."

It seems probable that Italian Switzerland may offer some valuable suggestions to those seeking to solve minority difficulties elsewhere. A combination of factors exists here which has proved to be explosive in other countries. Why not here?

Analysis indicates that Italian Fascist leaders deserve some credit. They have respected Swiss sensibilities, have not been so untactful as German National Socialists on northern Swiss borders.

Statesman of High Rank.

At the same time, Italian Switzerland has produced a leader of the type most useful in this critical period. Signor Giuseppe Motta, Federal Councillor, has proved to be a statesman of the first rank. A native of Ticino, he has solved every difficulty with Fascist Italy in a spirit of compromise; he has remained on the best of terms with Signor Mussolini without sacrificing Swiss principles.

But there have been brilliant leaders in other countries where minority problems are now acute. The complete absence of any "problem" in Italian Switzerland must be traced to something more than individual influence. The Italian minority in Switzerland has remained loyal to the Confederation now, under pressure, because long ago, without pressure, they were permitted to exercise completely that full measure of self-government which is important to all self-respecting groups. That seems to be the fundamental difference between this and other, less contented, European minorities.

Italian Fascism has made no converts in Italian-speaking Switzerland because it can offer the Swiss little or nothing which they do not already possess; while at the same time the Swiss along the borders can see for themselves that Fascism would require them to sacrifice some privileges they value.

If minorities elsewhere had been accepted as full partners in the enterprise of government, as Italian Swiss have been; if there had been no distinctions made between the position of "minorities" and "majority;" then it seems probable that other minorities might be no more of a problem than are the Italian Swiss.

RETREATING ALPINE GLACIER.

Dr. P. L. Mercanton, chief of the Swiss Meteorological Office and a well known glaciologist, has just published the results of the observations made on Swiss Alpine glaciers during the year 1936-37.

Snowfalls were very abundant during that period, principally in February and March, and the summer heat, though particularly great in May and June, was unable to dispose of the accumulated masses. The consequence was that the limit of everlasting snows stood, according to the regions, from 30ft. to 90ft. under the 1935-36 level. That explains why the retreating movement of Alpine glaciers somewhat slackened.

Credits for glaciological studies having been reduced, it was possible to observe and measure only 71 glaciers instead of 100 out of the 500 existing ones.

Among the retreating glaciers the Rhone glacier receded by 2ft. (30ft. in 1935-36), the Aletsch by 54ft. (21ft.), the Kaltwasser by 129ft. (60ft.), the Allalin by 87ft. (54ft.), the Fee by 57ft. (63ft.), the Unteraar by 60ft. (54ft), the Higher Grindelwald by 51ft. (42ft.).

The importance of the retreating movement of certain glaciers was ascertained by further measurements. For instance, the Oberaar lost about 7,900 square yards in surface, and the Unteraar nearly 20,000 square yards.

A few glaciers were decidedly progressing, among them the Martinets, the advance of which was 24ft., and the Seex Rouge, which progressed 15ft. On the whole nine were progressing, eight were at a standstill, and 54 were retreating.

Some valuable experiments were carried out on the Unteraar glacier with a view to fixing the depth of the bed on which it lies. The time taken for sound produced by explosions on the surface to reach the bottom was registered by seismographs. This process made it possible to ascertain that in the middle of the glacier for instance, the ice is 750ft. thick at the lowest depth of the under-glacial valley. Similar measurements will in the course of time be made on the bigger glaciers.

PERSONAL

We extend our deep sympathy to Mr. J. J. Boos and family in their great bereavement. Mrs. Rose Ellen Boos having passed away, after a short illness at the age of 55.

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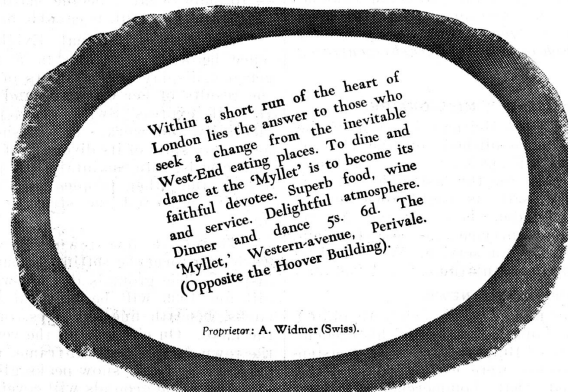
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